

NEWS RELEASE

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Governor Encourages State Employees to Work Healthier
Eight new recommendations call for healthy eating and physical activity

Tuesday, Gov. Olene Walker announced eight *Work Well* recommendations to help Utah state employees eat better and get more physical activity. The recommendations are designed to prevent obesity, decrease absenteeism and health care costs, reduce stress, improve morale and productivity, and promote the lifelong health of employees and their families.

"It is very important we put emphasis on the health and well-being of Utahns," Walker said. "By issuing these recommendations to state employees, we hope to begin a trend of healthy living. By implementing this program, we want employees and their families to realize the wonderful benefits of being able to live long, productive and happy lives."

Walker was joined by Utah Department of Health (UDOH) Executive Director Scott Williams, MD. Williams addressed the issues related to obesity in the state.

"As most of us already know, obesity and its related health and financial costs are at epidemic proportions," Williams said "Utahns spend hundreds of millions of dollars each year on obesity-related medical costs for conditions such as diabetes, heart disease and arthritis. Not only are these financial costs staggering, but lifestyle factors related to obesity are known to effect productivity, absenteeism, and morale, not to mention quality of life and happiness."

According to a provisional UDOH survey, as of September 2004, more than 55 percent of Utah adults, or 870,000 people, are overweight. Almost 20 percent, or 308,000 people, are obese. Not surprisingly, obesity trends among Utah's state employees mirror those statewide. Fifty-five percent of state employees have a diagnosis related to being overweight, according to Public Employees Health Program, the health insurance program for state employees. And while the average per-member per-month health insurance cost is \$220, that cost can increase dramatically for an overweight person.

Eight recommendations form the basis of Walker's new *Work Well* program for Utah's 24,000 state employees. Central to the recommendations is starting agency-based wellness councils that work closely with upper management to address the health and wellness needs of employees. The complete list of recommendations includes:

1. Offering healthy menu choices at each work meeting, conference, and training where food may be served.
2. Posting healthy eating messages in cafeterias, break rooms and vending areas.
3. Working with vendors in state facilities to include healthy options in vending machines, based on customer preference.
4. Encouraging employees to exercise, including the implementation of the existing exercise release policy of 30 minutes, three times per week, with supervisor approval.
5. Promoting the use of stairs as a way to get more daily physical activity.
6. Encouraging employees to walk, bike, or bus to work and, where circumstances permit, providing showers, lockers, bike racks, discounted bus passes, and flexible working schedules.
7. Educating employees about trails and pathways that are safe and near worksites.
8. Establishing worksite wellness councils to support healthy eating and daily physical activity.

Highlighting the healthy options the State Capitol complex's on-site restaurant offers daily, Walker said, "The State Room Café is able to run a profitable business and offer healthy menu choices. There are numerous cafeterias and vending machines in state buildings across Utah, and I encourage all state agencies to offer healthy menu choices so employees have the opportunity to 'Work Well.'"

Worksite wellness councils are an integral part of offering healthy menu choices and making other environmental changes. Judith Henley's grass-roots wellness council at the Utah Department of Corrections started a walking group that has helped employees reduce stress, get more physical activity and eat better, and improve overall morale. "The best part is, the council only meets one hour per month," Henley said.

For more information about Work Well, visit www.healthyutah.org/workwell.

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